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U. S. Department of Agriculture

HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Wednesday, July 11, 1934.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "Hints for Rural Businesswomen." Information from Miss Florence Hall, Extension Service, U.S.D.A.

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Rural women all over the country are interested nowadays in making money at home. Many a farm and small-town woman has developed a successful business selling her home products at a cooperative market or a roadside stand. Others have turned their homes into roadside inns and are making a good thing of putting up tourists for the night.

But that's the bright side of the home-business story. There's another side not so bright -- the homemade food that didn't sell, the tourist who didn't stop or was dissatisfied. Some women have become discouraged over their home ventures, have even lost money on them.

What makes the difference between success and failure? Well, a good many different things, of course. But one important reason is quality. Some people try to sell goods that aren't up to standard. Some women think that because a pink cake pleases their family, it should sell well to outsiders. Some women think that because a piece of handwork looks pretty to them, the rest of the world will want to buy it. Quality standards are needed in such cases.

Well, here I am chatting along when I planned today to repeat some helpful suggestions on this subject from Miss Florence Hall of the Extension Office in Washington, D. C. The rural women in the State of New Hampshire who run roadside markets got together this spring at a conference to talk over ways of making their business more successful. They asked Miss Hall to come up and give them a talk. I'm going to pass along to you now some of the things she told them. She said:

"Farm women's markets are flourishing in many states. Many other women add to their incomes by selling food and handicraft from their own homes to their friends, or to local shops on a commission basis. A New York State woman has sold 150 dozen doughnuts in a few months through a local shop. Another New York woman, who lives at an intersection of two well-traveled roads, sold over \$200 worth of jams and jellies alone last summer over a kitchen table in her front yard. These women found success through specializing in one product and making that perfect.

"From observation and from talks with both producers and customers, I find five factors that help bring in the dollars: first, have a product the public wants; second, have it perfect; third, always have it; fourth, always have it perfect; fifth, charge a fair price for it.

"To learn what your public wants, study it. Ask questions. Learn from others. Be on the alert for new ideas. Let the Extension Service help you.

"Recently I talked with the manager of the food shop run by the Women's Educational and Industrial Union in Boston. This shop specializes in high-quality, homemade foods. I asked the manager to tell me some of the best sellers there. She mentioned cakes first, especially small cakes and those that sell for fifty or seventy-five cents, and cookies -- the crisp, brown, thin, crunchy kind. As for pickles and relishes, she said old-fashioned cucumber ring pickles sold well, those about the size of a silver dollar in diameter. The shop sells more picalilli and chow-chow than any other relish.

"Jellies sell best either in little individual jars or in six- to eight-ounce jars, with a very thin layer of paraffin on top. Of course, currant jelly is a best seller. So is barberry and apple jelly, rose geranium and apple jelly, lemon verbena jelly, and quince and apple jelly. Then, grape conserve from Concord grapes and cranberry, quince and apple conserve are also very popular. People also buy a good many home-canned wild blueberries for pies, and wild strawberry preserves. Honey has a good sale if it is one of the delicate-flavored honeys -- clover, honeysuckle or wisteria. So has maple sirup, especially that made from the first run of the sap which has the finest flavor.

These best sellers are all "specialties" of individual women, and are all of the very highest quality. Notice how it has paid to make the most of local products, for example, the maple sirup and the wild blueberries and strawberries, typical of New England.

"What the public wants is perfection in homemade products. Nowadays so many high-quality commercial products are on the market that competition is keen. The fact that a product is homemade doesn't necessarily recommend it anymore. It must be excellent as well.

"How can you judge what perfection in your product is? Well, the Extension Service can help you here. Have you tried their score cards for jelly, breads and cakes? Using a score card will help you rate your own product. If you and some friends are interested, you'll find a scoring party a great help. Each one in the group brings a cake or a loaf of bread or a glass of jelly to the meeting. Then the foods specialist or the home demonstration agent will show you how to judge your own product as well as your neighbor's. By comparing your product with a standard, you will learn what a high-quality product is and how to judge it.

"Only the other day a group of neighbors in Connecticut had just such a party. Eleven women brought angel cakes to the meeting. The food specialist showed them how to apply the score card and each woman in the group scored the eleven cakes. Each was able in this way to learn her own shortcomings and how to remedy them. It is a fine thing to know how to produce a perfect article of food for your own family, but it is absolutely necessary, if you're producing for trade.

"Ask the specialist in the Extension Service: 'What's the matter with the way I cook biscuits?' Or ask her any other question about products you want to sell. Don't be like the man who was continually ailing but wouldn't go to the doctor because he was afraid the doctor would find something the matter with him."

